

# Cutler Bay

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## Council to consider approval for a charter school

BY ALEX BUTLER

*Special to the Miami Herald*

Town Hall could have a new neighbor if the Cutler Bay town council passes a resolution to allow a nearby four-story office building to be converted into a charter school.

Pinnacle Investment Properties seeks approval of a conditional use application to convert the 58,428 square feet of office space in the building at 10750 Caribbean Blvd. into Virtus Academy K-10 Public Charter School. Alliance Development entered into a contract with Pinnacle Investment Properties to buy and renovate the 2.16-acre property.

“Cutler Bay is growing,” said Thomas David, chairman of the board of directors of Virtus Academy. “It has a high demand for school services and for school choice options and it has an excellent future and a very good municipal government to work with. So we found a good site that’s near a lot of transportation lines and we feel very good about the fact that there are students who are essentially commuting from all over South Dade that can get there very easily.”

If the conditional use application is approved, the applicant must then obtain administrative site plan approval to implement the proposal.

The building would include 33 classrooms, a music lab, a computer lab, an art lab and a cafeteria. The current north-side parking area would be converted into a basketball/volleyball court, a mini soccer field, a walking track and a pre-k to 2 play area. When completed, the population of the school would include 902 students and 55 staff members.

“We filed an application with Miami-Dade County Public Schools, and we were granted the authority to proceed,” David said. “We are negotiating our final contract with them for our license to operate the charter.”

The developer will upgrade fire protection, life safety and mechanical, electrical and plumbing systems in the building, which was built in 1960. The renovation also includes a roof replacement, elevator modernizations, upgrading parking lots and a 10-foot perimeter safety fence surrounding recreational facilities.

“The developer sees the potential and investment,” Town Manager Ralph Casals said. “From my standpoint, we have great quality public schools and folks will now have options. We’ve heard that the residents have strived for high-quality education, which has been offered by public schools.”

Cutler Bay Academy of Advanced Studies, Centennial Campus received a B grade last year from the Florida Department of Education. Cutler Ridge Elementary School received a C and Cutler Bay Academy of Advanced Studies, Cutler Ridge Campus received a D grade in 2014.

“There are parents in the deep South Dade area who are not as happy with their schools options as you may think,” David said. “We are very excited to be in Cutler Bay. We think Cutler Bay has excellent leadership and we are looking forward to working with them. We think that at the end of the process, they are going to be excited to have another option for their kids.”

Pinnacle Investment Properties requested that the resolution be deferred at the town council’s June 17 meeting in an effort to further brief council members on the project.

“We said we would be glad to do it,” David said. “It’s not unusual in zoning cases that sometimes local governments want to have pre-briefings, even though it is a quasi judicial hearing, it is permitted. We have no problem doing it.”

The town council meets again at 7 p.m. July 15 at Town Hall, 10720 Caribbean Blvd.

David said the school is aiming to open in August 2016 and that local parents will be selected to the board to be part of the school’s “oversight team.”

Virtus Education, Inc. is a not for profit corporation.



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